

EXHIBIT 27

UTAH STATE FOOTBALL

Utah State AD Diana Sabau responds to ‘misinformation circling online’

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Diana Sabau, vice president and director of athletics at Utah State University, speaks to reporters in Salt Lake City on Friday, July 26, 2024. | Laura Seitz, Deseret News



By Trent Wood

Trent Wood is a sports writer for the Deseret News.

On Thursday, Utah State football officially began preparations for the upcoming 2024 season.

Players reported, though most have been in and around Logan throughout the summer. Coaches and players fielded questions from media, all assembled for the program’s annual media day.

All eyes were drawn to the future of Aggie football, both the immediate and the long term, and optimism abounded as is the norm for this time of year.

But before all that, USU athletic director Diana Sabau sought to clear up — again — the controversy of the recent past that has dominated conversation about USU football.

Sabau spoke for nearly 20 minutes, reiterating many of the points she'd previously made regarding the investigation that led to the termination of Blake Anderson, Jerry Bovee, Amy Crosbie and Austin Albrecht.

Renewed interest in the topic — if it had waned at all — was in response to new information released by Utah State on Wednesday.

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The university provided more information about when and how the independent investigation by Husch Blackwell came about, in response to “misinformation circling online.”

Specifically:

- In July last year, USU's former president Noelle Cockett “initiated an independent review by law firm Husch Blackwell upon the recommendation of USU's Office of Equity and Office of Legal Affairs.”
- The investigation's purpose was not to target any specific individuals.
- Husch Blackwell was asked to investigate 1. Which employees learned of allegations of sexual misconduct and/or criminal conduct by a USU football player during the spring of 2023; 2. How the employees learned about the allegations; 3. When they learned about any allegations; 4. Whom they told about these allegations; 5. To look into relevant employees' understanding of athletics' and USU reporting policies and requirements.

After Cockett's departure, the investigation by Husch Blackwell continued at the approval and request of new Utah State university president Elizabeth Cantwell.

Per the university, the investigators notified Bovee and Anderson of the investigation in mid-August, which was before Sabau started her role as athletics director.

The additional information led to further questions.

What role, if any did Diana Sabau play in the investigation after becoming athletic director?

Sabau was officially named the athletic director at Utah State on Aug. 7, 2023.

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Questions were raised as to what role Sabau had in regards to the investigation over the nearly 10 months between her appointment and the termination of Anderson.

Sabau was definitive that she had no role whatsoever.

“Zero. I was told of the investigation after I arrived on campus as an employee of Utah State University,” she said. “In all of my training in intercollegiate athletics I realized that when there is an investigation, when law enforcement agencies are involved, as an administrator in intercollegiate athletics the approach should be hands off. I didn’t receive updates. I did not know who was being interviewed. I was made aware of the findings when they were made presented to the university president and the administration.”

Sabau reiterated that the investigation by Husch Blackwell was done independent of Utah State.

Per Sabau, she and Cantwell were notified of the findings by the investigation at the same time, and then they collaborated with the Board of Trustees and “advisement from outside counsel,” as far as how to proceed.

“There was a comprehensive review of the findings,” Sabau said. “With global involvement.” Sabau noted that she didn’t recall how long it took to come to the decision to terminate Anderson, Bovee, Crosbie and Albrecht, but she estimated it as taking weeks.

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“It was extensive. These were hard decisions,” Sabau said. “These were people who made bad choices and bad decisions. They are not bad people. But to continue with the trajectory. To continue with Utah State as the state land grant, as an institutions that many alums, donors and investors are proud of, as our football team continues to grow and prosper. To be on this same trajectory was not acceptable. We did what was right and stand by the findings of this independent investigation.”

She added: “As you all know, the Department of Justice has lived on this campus since 2020,” Sabau said. “Because of crimes within the football program. The Department of Justice has renewed that relationship with Utah State for another year because there has not been improvement in the culture of the football program. I’m looking very much forward to changing that culture and having improvement by our young men off the field, both academically and within the community.”

Does Diana Sabau have a response to the letter of support for Jerry Bovee and Amy Crosbie that was

signed by numerous former and current Aggie athletes?

Earlier this week, a letter was released to media that included the names of many notable current and former USU athletes, which called for another independent investigation, this time into the terminations of Bovee and Crosbie.

Sabau had little to say about the letter, noting, “No, that is a freedom of speech (issue). I believe in supporting what you believe, and who you want to support as individuals. That is your choice and those people should have that right. That is the same reason we are respecting the rights of the people involved in these employment actions. We are making sure we are following university policy and procedure. There is a grievance process to these employment actions and because of that grievance process we are respecting those individuals. We want them to have that runaway. We are going to honor that and we won’t be releasing additional information and additional facts until that time expires. Until they have their due process. Because that is important and they deserve that.”

Sabau noted that three student-athletes whose names were included in the aforementioned letter reached out to her and “reemphasized” that they did not give permission for their names to be on the letter.³³³³

“I’ll just leave it at that,” Sabau said. “These are young people and we should be focused on serving them, not exploiting them and not using them to a greater good or to highlight anyone’s profession or career. If they choose to do that, that’s great. That is their independent decision.”

Does Diana Sabau have a relationship with Husch Blackwell?

An idea that had gained some traction in some discussions was whether or not Sabau had a preexisting relationship with the law firm of Husch Blackwell. Headquartered in Kansas City, Husch Blackwell is a national firm with offices in Chicago and throughout the Midwest, where Sabau had spent the majority of her professional career, be it with the Big Ten or at Ohio State.

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Sabau was definitive in that she has no relationship whatsoever with the firm.

“You can check this with the independent law firm. I have no relationship with Husch Blackwell. I have never met the investigators. I’ve never talked to the investigators. I have not been involved with them in so much of a, any kind of communication. Zero, as I said before. I had zero involvement in the investigation. It was commissioned before I got here and to step into that would be ill advised. That is not who I am as a person and not what I would do as a professional.”

Sabau did note that Husch Blackwell is a well respected law firm nationally, and is known for its work in the NCAA.

“It does a lot of work with intercollegiate athletics departments, at very high levels like the Power Five and within Group of Five institutions. They are very active in the investigation space and are very active in helping advance universities and help athletics departments reach institutional goals. That is what I know about them.”

How can the culture be changed within the Utah State football program?

Sabau noted that changing the culture of Utah State football isn’t going to be a quick fix. But it is a change that needs to occur.

“We need to get and modernize our athletic department to current social standards, to acceptable behaviors and be in alignment with the values of this community and our institution,” she said. “This is not what I want, it is for the greater good. I want to be clear with that. I am in alignment with that. Please realize that young peoples lives have forever been changed because of the actions of some people. We can’t cast that aside and turn a blind eye.”

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In an effort to change the culture, USU will institute year-over-year trainings to educated coaches and student-athletes as to what the standards are, and to familiarize them with the Title IX and Equity office.

“Moving forward, we will continue with our education process with our coaches and our student-athletes,” Sabau said. “We are having a much more engaged process with our Title IX and Equity office. They are meeting with all of our coaches individually to establish relationships so people realize what they need to do and when they need to do it. It is a relationship, not a transaction.”

Sabau noted that there will be increased signage at the university as well going forward, in an effort to improve the culture of the program.

What does Diana Sabau hope the future of USU athletics looks like?

Sabau was clear, she wants USU to be of benefit for student-athletes going forward.

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“That is what we are here for,” she said. “We are here for our student-athletes.”

And in the short term, she has high hopes for the success of Aggie football.

“Our football young men have worked really hard through the offseason and are ready to take it to the next level,” she said. “We are ready and I am excited to move forward. ... We are proud to have Nate Dreiling as our interim head coach. I am very proud of our staff

which has pulled together and united behind him. They have a plan, a scheme and a system that they are ready to execute. We know that is going to be executed with some adversity, but our young men believe so why doesn't everybody? Why not USU this year?"



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